T862: Studies and Critical Discussion  
Spring 2003

Foundations of Reformed Faith and Practice in the Theology of John Calvin

Welcome to T862: Studies and Critical Discussion: John Calvin. This is going to be an advanced reading seminar that will use John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as the seminal source for the Reformed family of Protestant churches. Emphasis will be on Calvin’s most crucial and constructive contributions. The last three weeks we will read Shirley Guthrie’s *Christian Doctrine* and compare it to the *Institutes* to see Calvin’s continuing influence and how some Reformed theology has changed.

**Texts:**


Course Requirements:

1. **Participation:** You presence and participation will weigh substantially in the grade for this class. Each week, you should have completed the assigned readings and be prepared to participate thoughtfully in a discussion of them. Expect your grade to drop if you miss more than two class sessions, are frequently late, or appear not to have read the assignments.

2. **Weekly Papers:** Six short papers (2 single-spaced pages), each written right after a class session, will ensure that you are understanding the key issues. You should start these right after next week’s class to get them over with. Each paper must be turned in the week after the class session and reading that it covers. Page 1 of the weekly paper should describe the main issues and insights from the previous week’s discussion and reading, not in the form of listing topics covered, but summarizing the most important content. Do Not use phrases like, “First we talked about, and then we talked about...” Instead, it should be more like, “The most important issue was about sin as loss of trust in God.” Page 1 should not include your further opinions or reflections on the issues - that comes on Page 2. On Page 2, reflect on what you found most important, your growing edges, and your further thinking about key insights.

3. **Reading in Calvin and Presenting what you find:** In addition to the assigned reading, you should pick an issue or an area of Calvin’s writings that you are interested in (and that is not covered in class) and read in it. For example, look at Calvin’s *Commentary on Genesis* for insight on how he handles the conflict between biblical inspiration and science. In weeks 9 and 10 (Mar. 26 & Apr. 2) everyone will share with the class what they have read and learned in a brief oral presentation (15 minutes each). You should discuss your choice for the reading with the instructor by March 5 (just before reading week).

3. **Worship:** Each class member will lead a 10-15 minute worship session at the end of class. The worship should incorporate some aspect of Reformed theology and practice in a liturgically meaningful way. Feel free to use materials from Reformed prayer books (citing them properly!), whether historical or contemporary, but you must write some of the worship yourself (prayer or litany or brief homily). Each week we will discuss the previous week’s worship, so be prepared to explain what makes it distinctively “Reformed”.

4. **Alternative Proposals:** If you wish to do an alternative project, such as a major term paper (20-25 pages) or some other project, instead of the 6 short papers, you should negotiate this with the instructor by the third class (Feb. 5).
**Calendar:**

Jan. 22  
First class:  Introductions to each other, to the syllabus, and to Calvin.

Jan. 29  
Knowledge of God in Creation and Scripture: Bk 1, chap I-VII (pp. 35-81)  
Worship:

February 5  
Providence, Human Nature, Principle of Accommodation:  
I:XIII-XVII (pp. 159-228)  
Worship:

February 12  
Third Use of the Law, Ten Commandments, Jews  
2:VII-VIII (pp. 348-423); 2:X-XI (pp. 428-464)  
Worship:

February 19  
Wrath of God and the Atonement; Christian Freedom; Adiaphora  
2:XVI (pp. 503-528); Book 3:XVII (pp. 802-821)  
Worship:

February 26  
Prayer; Hell, and Predestination: pp. 850-897; p. 1007; pp. 920-987  
Worship:

March 5  
Sacraments:  Book 4:XIV-XVII (pp. 1276-1429)  
Worship:

March 12  
Reading Week:  No Class

March 19  
Civil Government:  4:XX (pp. 1485-1521)  
Worship:

March 26  
Oral reports on readings:  
Worship:

April 2  
Oral reports on readings:  
Worship:

April 9  
Guthrie Parts 1 and 2;  Worship:

April 16  
Holy Week:  No Class

April 23  
Guthrie Parts 3 and 4;  Worship:

April 30  
Guthrie Part 5;  Worship:

May 7  
Exam Week:  Make up day if needed
Bibliography

This is just a small sample that contains some of the better known works and a few interesting-looking ones. For a more complete list, go to the library website, www.palni.edu.


Parker, T. H. L. [There are many books on Calvin by Parker, a well-known Calvin scholar.]
